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Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader, I can't overstate how much
my judgment...



Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader,

I can't overstate how much my judgment has improved over the past ten years.

WOW.

Even more incredible?

I'm not done yet.

If I knew then what I know now...

I would have saved myself a whole lot of trouble.

But, alas — such is the way of things.

I suffered so I could learn.

And I wouldn't have grown if I didn't suffer.

Suffering creates the desire to heal.

It's a noble desire.

Because true strength begins with **humility**.

Why do people seek transformation?

I see it so clearly at the Zen Center.

Why would anyone sit still for **seven whole days**?

Because good things **don't come easy**.

Because we want **freedom**.

We want to be **unburdened** from all our pain.

We want **a joy that cannot be found in the outside world**.

And we work hard for it.

In fact...

This is the most serious business there is.

The energy in the **zendo** during *sesshin* is like Will Smith in *The Pursuit of Happyness* taking that **final exam**.

Do or die.

And I get it.

For **most of my life**, I surrounded myself with people who **didn't deserve me**.

Pretty much across the board.

Maybe there were **some exceptions**, but I can't think of them right now.

There was a **massive boulder** on my back...

And I swear to God...

I just put it down a few months ago.

It was a curse.

A nightmare I could never wake up from.

No matter where I went.

What I did.

Who I dated.

What country I was in.

How much older I got.

Nothing changed.

The **same pattern** repeated itself.

I'd put in all the effort... and get **nothing back**.

A one-sided game.

And let me tell you...

That shit drains your **soul**.

Most people don't want change.

They SAY they do...

But when faced with the fire? They run.

People wonder why I'm an *old soul*.

This is why.

I had to **grow**—or stay locked in a **dysfunctional** mindset.

I had to evolve—or be forever stuck in a **small** role, shrinking **every day**.

Since I was little, I wanted **answers**.

I sensed something was **off** about my family.

But I didn't understand *how* or *why*.

So I turned to **books, wisdom, mentors**.

I wanted to be better.

Which, in and of itself, is more than most people will ever do.

Because let's be honest—most people **don't want to change**.

They **feed on** media that reinforces their beliefs.

And they **run from** anything that threatens them.

They tell themselves they're open-minded...

But when's the last time they **changed their mind**?

When's the last time they left and **came back different**?

Most people stay **the same**.

And here's what they don't tell you...

Change is messy.

It's uncomfortable.

You lose friends.

You make enemies.

People freak out.

Some reject you.

Some get jealous.

Friendships you thought were rock solid? **Brittle as sand.**

I make a fool of myself OFTEN.

Expectations be damned.

But that's **okay**—the most important thing is **taking a step** in the right direction.

Everything else will **correct** itself over time.

It's worth **any price**.

I had to suffer a long time before I got to that place.

And because of that, sometimes I try something **new**... and it **doesn't go well**.

I'm in a battle between an **old identity** and a **new one**.

I'm still **inexperienced**, so I make dumb mistakes.

But when you're **willing** to make a fool of yourself in the name of growth...

You're **willing** to go **farther** than the ones who play it safe.

Think about it—most people are **never** willing to look dumb.

And that means they're **eternally limited**.

They'll never step **outside** their comfort zone...

So they never **grow**.

They have no idea what they're missing.

Most people live in the **pool's shallow end**, where it's safe.

I think about it like Walter White in *Breaking Bad*.

In the beginning, Walter had a **naïve** view of the world.

He was angry, but **impotent**.

A **coward**.

Because Walter never **did shit**.

He played it **safe**.

Tighty-whities.

Missionary on date night.

One hand job per year on your anniversary.

Later on?

After taking the road **less traveled**?

We had **Heisenberg**.

Same man.

Same **preferences**.

But with **ruthless** judgment.

Walter White **never took risks**.

Heisenberg would do **whatever it took** to win.

He went too far.

But, a fascinating character study.

*Walter White saw the world through rose-colored glasses.
Heisenberg didn't.
And that? That's the difference.*

How to build judgment.

You don't build judgment by playing it **safe**.

You build judgment by getting **burned**.

By **learning the hard way**.

By **making mistakes**.

By **realizing you were wrong**.

And by **fixing it**—even when it's humiliating.

I **will never** let someone else dictate my life again.

So every day...

I **sharpen** my judgment.

And I get **better**.

There was once a time when I ignored red flags.

I lived off magical thinking.

I'd hope for change without doing anything different.

But there's power in rejection and failure.

I made this mistake so many times that I'm firmly convinced in the error of my ways.

Today, I know better than to ignore the signs life is trying to give me.

Nothing good comes from ignoring red flags.

I trust what my eyes see.

I happen to know I have good judgement, so, I allow myself the space to believe in myself.

There's another type of freedom that comes from healing.

When you don't need validation...

You can see people for what they really are.

Not for who you want them to be.

They can't fool you.

Or manipulate you.

I used to live in a world that made no sense.

Things just happened, and I just suffered.

I was a victim.

Today, I know that I have my part to play in all of this toxicity.

I can point the finger all I want...

But that doesn't serve me.

It's a lose-lose proposition.

I used to be everybody's Patsy.

I was a mark.

I had a target on my back.

I was gullible.

Easily guilt-tripped.

Too naive.

Too quick to give people unearned respect.

Too quick to accept blame.

Too quick to believe lies.

Too quick to ignore what I already know.

It all amounted to a life and a worldview that didn't serve me.

I made up the rules...

And I was losing the game anyway!

It all goes back to childhood.

I've mentioned before that my therapist Zalman says that most people are kids in adult bodies.

What he doesn't say is that I'm pretty sure he means 90%+ of people.

That means you, too, buddy.

Sorry.

He prides himself in getting his patients to the point where they're the only adult in the room.

“It gives you an unfair advantage.” He said.

“You don’t need to act out your childhood trauma ad infinitum.”

“Groundhog’s day is finally over.”

Zalman once told me something that stuck with me:

“When you grow, your circle shrinks. And that’s a good thing.”

“You may be alone. But you won’t be lonely.”

“Because when you don’t need the world to validate you...”

“That’s when you become the only adult in the room.”

From my perspective... it’s like I crawled out of the nine circles of hell... and found myself in a magical land. Eden, more or less.

A good part of sharpening judgment comes from trusting what you already know.

*I used to distrust myself.
My gut. My instincts. My own damn eyes.
Not anymore.*

Life has made me wise.

I have uncovered many secrets to life.

Some people keep making the same mistake over and over and over again.

No matter how many times life tries to teach them their lesson...

They refuse to learn it.

Find any resistance in your life, and I'll put money on you haven't learned your lesson yet.

I don't know why this is the case...

But I've found that life likes to test me over and over.

Almost like God is checking to see if I finally got the message.

You don't have to resist what life is trying to teach you.

More freedom comes from embracing life's lessons.

Human beings have a way of trying to recreate situations that look exactly like whatever they knew in childhood.

We keep getting seduced by the familiar in order to resolve your unfinished business.

But once you face your demons, they stop being so scary.

Then you can wave at them and walk right on bye...

And if you want to get better, too?

Then **step into the fire**.

Because comfort will never make you sharp.

Only pressure does that.

🔥 If this hit home, and you're ready to evolve...

Join Permission to Be Powerful.

Get the raw truth.

Learn battle-tested insights.

Build the wisdom no one else will tell you.

Because sharpening your judgment isn't just about knowing better...

It's about BEING better.

Most people never change.

Same mistakes. Same regrets. Same bullshit—forever.

You don't have to.

Step into the fire. Break the cycle.

It won't be easy. But safe stories are boring.

The best ones? They're earned in fire.

Join Permission to Be Powerful if you're done playing small.

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Until next time,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anton Volney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Anton" on the left and "Volney" on the right, separated by a diagonal stroke. There are several thick, intersecting lines that cut through the signature, creating a complex web-like pattern over the text.

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist.



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